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God in Government.

A SERMON:

PREACHED ON THE

DAY OF THE NATIONAL FAST,

January 4, 1861,

IN THE CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY, PHILADELPHIA.

BY

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RECTOR.

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S E R M O N .

“LET EVERY SOUL BE SUBJECT UNTO THE HIGHER POWERS, FOR THERE IS NO POWER BUT OF GOD. THE POWERS THAT BE ARE ORDAINED OF GOD.”—Romans xiii. 1.

THIS chapter contains a statement of the politics of St. Paul, and the opening verse indicates their fundamental principle.

That principle is, that civil government is a Divine institution. Valuable at all times as a constant truth, it is especially important now when we feel it to be a practical truth. We are summoned together to deprecate a threatened calamity. The nation is summoned, for the calamity is national. The emergency has produced striking exhibitions of strength and of weakness, of wisdom and of folly. But to this hour the strength has accomplished no more than the weakness, and the wisdom has proved itself no more successful than folly. In this crisis of imbecility our chief magistrate asks us to pray.

It is well for us to pray to the God of nations, if

it were only to recognize thereby a truth which our nation has seemed sometimes to be well-nigh forgetting. Our sin has been that we have not acknowledged his sovereignty when the acknowledgment would have rebuked us. May it be reckoned as our repentance that we invoke His Almightyness at last when His power alone can save us.

There are calamities which are from their nature beyond human reach to cause or cure. The pestilence, the famine, the earthquake, come forth from the secrets of Nature, and give no account of themselves to our inquisitive science, and so we call them Providential evils. The universal wail shows that human skill has proved itself powerless, and then we look above and seem to see the omnipotent right arm just receding among the clouds that envelop the throne of God. But although in social and political calamities we can trace each trouble to its source, and unravel the web of cause and effect, yet it is not less rational to recognize that sovereignty which is none the less sovereign, because we can define its working.

While to-day we sit apart from our business, gazing face to face upon the coming trial, let me ask you to reflect upon the Divine authority of civil government, and upon some of the causes which have led us habitually to forget it. Our national

unity is shaken and may be soon shattered. Our polity rocks to and fro, as if an earthquake were beneath us. Men and communities resist the authority of government as if it were right and glorious to do so. The period has developed a pride and self-will that have amazed us, and we ask how it has come to pass. In attempting to answer how, if I should answer in a sentence, I would say it comes to pass because the people have forgotten the great truth that government is divine; that "the powers that be are ordained of God." But I would rather undertake to show the causes of this very forgetfulness, and how it results from the necessity of cause and effect that the thick coming peril is upon us to-day: 1st, I would lay the prime cause back in the constitution of the American character. Of that character the surpassing trait is energy.

It is not that we are a more thoughtful people than others—nor indeed so much so as some others. Mind is active, but it is excursive; too active to be sober and safe; as quick to hug a fanatical foolery as to grasp a solid truth; too impatient to be wise. The nature of this energy, this *inworking* (for so it means) is *intensity*, and its manifestation is *exaggeration*.

In thought, in morals, in politics, in practical life, the American character exaggerates. American

orations sometimes drive the powers of rhetoric and of fancy to the verge of sense, and beyond. American wit is thought, pushed to the degree of absurdity. Our theorists are men of one idea, which to them is as large as the round world, and they that dwell therein. Nay, more than this. The one idea of the American is always the centre of a system, around which all other ideas revolve. If the idea be anti-slavery, then slavery is the colossal curse and sin that dwarfs all others. If it be pro-slavery, then slavery is that sweet, Divine benediction upon society that is destined to inaugurate a new Paradise. Our practical men enterprise great things, achieve splendid successes, and precipitate no less splendid failures. Our public spirited men make vast endowments; our villains perpetrate the most stupendous frauds. This inworking impulse is alike restless under delay and under toil. The countless inventions of the Patent Office, for labor-saving, demonstrate the American predominance of brain over muscle, and his intense impatience of toil.

All these, the merits and the faults, the successes and the failures, work the one and self-same quality, which we call energy, the restlessness of the nervous system. And this impulse from within is mated by the freedom without, and both together combine to form the American character. I know

not whether the freedom solicited forth the energy, or the energy impelled the freedom; which is mother, and which is child; or whether both be married together as husband and wife. But I know that when they go abroad upon the world to seek their fortune hand in hand, the energy unrepressed and the freedom unbridled, he must be a bold prophet to insure the safe result of any enterprise upon which they may jointly enter. Since, in the nature of things, the energy could never repress itself, nor the freedom be self-curtailed, not only must the progress be violent and the resultant full of havoc, but the same inherent causes would prevent wisdom proceeding from the woe.

Sanguine, eager, forth-putting, wilful, even if sagacious, such is our national portrait.

2dly. And now mark how these qualities have expressed themselves and been nurtured through our peculiar style of education. There are two chief methods of training the human character, the one a method of restraint, and the other a method of incitement. Historically, they might be designated as the Spartan and the Athenian method. The Spartan education was exclusively a system of control. The Athenian one of development. A single glance demonstrates under which title our own system falls, and traces the Athenian likeness

in us, throughout. We are a commercial people as well as they, restless, busy, and enterprising, fathoming all depths, measuring all distances, and testing, if not torturing, all the powers of nature and art. We plant a ladder at every post of honor. We widen the paths of social distinction. We open the arena of political competition to all comers, and confer the crown on the best wrestler. Our education lives by incitement, and its result is development. It tends eminently to exalt the *individual*, and it results in a system of individualism.

Now if human attributes were all and altogether virtuous; if man's spiritual character had no worm of evil gnawing at its germ; if it were only necessary to impart warmth to powers and qualities whose natural growth is Heavenward, the system of incitement would be beyond question the safe and sure education; the education of Heaven and for Heaven. But if the fall of man be a fact of his history, and if his nature has received a bias and distortion from that shock; if his life is crowded with vicious incitements, and his own insurgent instincts of evil are developed at even an equal pace with his virtues; then he requires a training which shall not only nurture the tardy good, but fetter the swift sin of his nature. The radical need of his education would be that of restraint.

Without it the stimulated nature may develop into surpassing prowess, mental and physical; into tall independence and jealous self-respect. But if the educational system be exclusively stimulating, it strengthens the personal biases of each man into offensive singularities, insulates him from his fellows, unfits him for the accommodation of society, renders him less considerate of the common interest, less observant of law, wayward in his indulgences, inveterate in his self-will, and in every way a worse citizen. We may track this disastrous influence on many a page of our history, from the nursery, through the school-house and the college, up to the commonwealth; in the precocious self-will of the child, the insubordination of youth, and the want of reverence for authority in the people. Through how many generations these qualities must run, gathering force and aggravation, before they shall explode the corporate unity of the nation, I will not undertake to forecast. I humbly trust not now. We are praying against the dire experiment to-day. But let the future be wary and watchful for these consequences. Be it ours here and now to denote the causes, and hereafter, if it may be, to obviate them by the antagonistic principle of restraint, first upon the child, and so of consequence upon the man and the citizen. It is a cogent and wholesome

power. Out of it comes self-denial, the backbone of heroism, the fulcrum of our moral manhood. Out of it come the love of order and of law, filial reverence to authority, and that submission which Bishop Berkeley calls the cement of society. It curbs the salient propensities, strikes off offensive peculiarities, engenders the sympathy of a common life, advances the whole humanity even if it represses the individual man, creates a national unity, is triumphant against invasion, and equally proof against insurrection and treason.

3dly. Let us pass now to consider what connection this character and this training may have had with our theory of political government. It has been remarked of the two great states of antiquity that the Roman education was a part of its government, and the Grecian government a part of its education. In this respect again we find a likeness between the Greek and the American. All our characteristics and circumstances, our history and our education combined to render it almost infallibly sure that our form of polity should be practically what it is—popular—instead of monarchical or aristocratic. But it is a very interesting and important question on what *theory* shall the government be based; or rather, for the real question lies one step farther back than this, on what principle shall the authority

of government be grounded. This radical question has created two schools of political philosophers. Up to the period of the Reformation the uniform sentiment of mankind had recognized the Divine authority of government. But when Luther hurled his iron gauntlet against the doors of the Vatican, challenging the supremacy of the Pope, the echo of that defiance proved as startling as if it were the fulmination of the Pope himself. It was the thunder of the Vatican reversed. All Europe was alarmed, and the whole question of government and its authority began to be revised and sifted. There grew a Protestantism in the State as well as in the Church. Yet be it observed, the question turned mainly not upon the authority, but upon the forms and methods of government. Protestantism was not as yet so irreligious as to deny the Divine authority of human government. It only maintained that there were certain ultimate and supreme rights belonging to the governed. Some writers, however, denied these ultimate rights, and Hobbes and Sir Robert Filmer propounded a theory of pure absolutism, rejecting all forms of government but the monarchical, and boldly asserting "the right divine of kings to govern wrong."

Against this system Mr. Locke reared his theory of the social contract. He maintained that govern-

ment was a matter of simple convention and agreement among all the people, and hence that rulers derived their authority solely from the people's gift. We see at once that this theory leaves the authority of human government shorn of all its divinity. As the stream cannot rise higher than its fountain, the government might be as basely human as the people sometimes are. It became at once the theory of atheism, and with Rousseau for its great prophet it acted out in France its pure unmitigated mischief in the atrocities of the Reign of Terror. This theory in its naked form was liable to severe objections. Historically it had no shadow of foundation. For from the time of Nimrod, who laid the first historical empire in conquest, down to the days of Mr. Locke, there probably had never been a people who had come together by common consent and agreed to create a government. In strict logic its government was a mobocracy; its decrees were lynch law, and its normal condition was revolution. Neither was the theory any more defensible in practice; for in no instance of a social contract can we suppose that the persons covenanting will be more than one in five of the whole number of the people.

The theory of the social contract, however, such as it is, with its grand religious defect, with its logical disabilities, with its practical self-contradic-

tion and its want of precedent and history, was no doubt the favorite theory of our Revolution. It was adapted to the American character, and it fell in with our education. It was democratic and it was progressive.

The fathers of the nation, however, did what they could to obviate its faults in every respect but in making the theory religious. To escape its mobocratic tendency, they required that the will of the people should be expressed in the forms of law. Nay, they erected a Constitution, which being the fruit of deliberation and forethought, uttering the solemn decree of the collective people, should be supreme over every other law, and save the nation from the mischief of mad majorities. But they did not even preface the Constitution with "In the name of God, amen!"

Here was the first, the flagrant, I trust it may not prove the fatal fault of a system of government otherwise the most admirable that was ever framed by human wisdom.

All else they did to supply to the theory its missing element of authority. They hedged their government, if not with a divinity, yet with that authority which, in their day, was fashionably thought to embody the only Divinity in the world, the enlightened reason of the nation.

The theory of the social contract then, in our hands, has parted with some of its most dangerous liabilities. But is it safe after all? Can it be perpetual? Does it grasp the sentiment of loyalty in the human heart without which no government can long subsist? For that sentiment is man's political conscience, the principle of allegiance to the God in government. Sceptreless and badgeless, it sits on his soul as on a throne, and bends down his nature to its felt sovereignty. It is not a fear nor a phantom. It is no hallucination nor trick of the fancy. It is a spiritual instinct. Its action is vital. It has the position of the heart in man's spiritual organism. If you compress it, it beats painfully. If you give it play, it sends with every glad pulse, health and generous vigor throughout the moral frame. No system of government that does not somehow engage this master principle of loyalty in close alliance, can ever be best or safest; cannot even insure its own subsistence for a day. Now, upon the theory of the social contract, what warrant has the State for obedience, and what security for patriotism? How can you be sure of inward order? How be safe against outward violence?

It cannot warrant obedience. For who made thee a ruler or a judge over me? The law, you answer. But what gives the law its validity and power?

Strength? Then, if I am stronger than my ruler, I may invade the capital, and usurp the sword or the robe. The majority of wills? Then I may muster a larger rabble of wills and overpower the law, or I may scare those wills with revolvers, that they have no choice but silence. Then, where is the law? Its majesty is a mockery, its word a sheer boast, its power that of the strongest. Brute force, after all. This will never do. Law must have an excellence beyond that of bone and muscle, or man's more excellent nature will refuse it reverence. It must bear a stamp and signature of more dignity than his neighbor's whim, or his pride will not bend before it. Its power must be superhuman, to control the human. Call it an abstraction; it is a power. I recognize a divinity in it. It seizes my spirit. It constrains my reverence. It holds me with all the power of conscience. I dare not be a rebel.

If the theory of the social contract is thus inefficacious in securing obedience, it is not less fruitless of patriotism. The very idea of a contract places the relation of citizens to each other and to the government, on the footing of a simple commercial transaction.

The principles that govern those relations must, accordingly, be such as rule in the mart and on the

exchange, viz., convenience, expediency, profit, or, perchance, the mercantile conscience. Are they sufficient for the tug and strain of great national emergencies, or even for the daily exigencies of good citizenship? Have we security for patriotism, for example, in the self-interest of the citizen, when his passions may run riot with his reason, and drag him into mad secession? "Appeal, then, to his conscience," says the theory. But remember that by the theory, government is only a bargain among equals. The conscience must be a mercantile conscience, and only that.

I do not disparage the mercantile character, but speak the simple truth of nature and of the nature of things, when I say that a transaction which recognizes only the relation that subsists between equals, can never be so binding on the conscience as one which acknowledges, likewise, a duty to God. The obligation of man to his fellow-man in their own mutual concernments, cannot rise to the dignity and awfulness of divinity. Interest, danger, pride, poverty, may easily distort the moral sense, when it is not reinforced by the sanctions of religion, till conscience herself knows no principle higher than the truckster's.

However strongly, then, the social theory of government may enforce the duty of patriotism, as an

obligation between man and man, it utterly fails to impress the conscience with the sanction of religion. Patriotism can no longer answer its ancient description, and fight for its altars and its hearths—for altars it has none. The social contract has no worship; no religion; no divinity in the State. It leaves that glorious attribute of man—his loyalty—with only one foot to stand upon—a lame and limping virtue, fit neither to fight nor to stand resistingly, but only to fail and fall at the first trial.

Now mark how the essential vices of the theory of the social contract are met and compensated by the theory of government propounded by the New Testament. “The powers that be are ordained of God;” and again, “He is the minister of God to them for good.” The principle of that theory is, that civil government is a Divine institution, taking rank with the church and the family; endued with a sort of personality; armed with an authority borrowed directly from heaven, and supreme within its sphere for the conservation of the nation’s welfare. That sphere is denoted by certain essential landmarks, of which I know of no better description than is found in our Declaration of Independence—“life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” the sacred rights of man. Civil government is God’s institute for conserving all these. While it is true

to this noble mission, it claims, with Divine authority, the homage of loyal and loving hearts; obedience for its support, patriotism for its vindication and defence. Only when government transcends those landmarks, and tramples those sacred rights of life, liberty, and the highest happiness of the governed, does it forfeit its divine dignity. Then its interference is tyranny, and these outraged rights of humanity are condensed into one sacred and impregnable right, divinely supreme above all others—the *right of revolution*.

Rebellion is then justifiable against government when conformity would be a crime against God or man; and then the power that was only delegated is superseded by the right which is ultimate and essential.

In this theory is to be found, I apprehend, the only true source of that authority which is indispensable to the security and perpetuity of the State. It addresses the noblest capacities of human nature, and bands them together in fealty and patriotism.

It reinforces our civil obligations by the highest sanctions of conscience, and makes both government and citizenship religious. It is beautiful to witness how almost unconsciously this theory is sanctioned by our spiritual instincts. For even with our loose and democratic training it is almost impossible to

separate the mind from the idea of a certain Divine and personal authority in the State. To us the great embodiment and expression of civil authority is in the Constitution of the United States. Why do we speak of the Constitution with reverence?—a thing of ink and parchment. Not because it is always wisest, perhaps. Many persons think it should be amended. Not because its framers were older men than we. The world was nearer its infancy then than now. Not because it was the collective voice of a generation, for that generation is far outnumbered by the present. Analyze your feelings, and you will find that you have unconsciously ascribed to the Constitution a sacredness higher than human—higher than earth-born. It is the utterance of the abstract nationality. It is the decree of that spiritual personality which, like a veiled Deity, sits behind the law and proclaims his own solemn and inviolable majesty. We listen, we reverence, we obey.

And mark, again, how beautifully this religious theory of government embraces and adopts the sentiment of patriotism. How may we interpret this inbegotten love of country, springing uncalled for in every man's bosom, often noblest in woman, and filling even the child's heart with romantic enthusiasm? It is an ennobling passion, wider and sub-

limer than domestic love, and only second in purity and fervor to the bonds of the church. What makes a patriot's death seem as glorious as a martyr's? What does he love when he loves his country? Nature and truth were made for each other, and affianced by God's decree. Here is the living instinct. Where is its living object? Bright skies, green fields, a genial climate? Go ask the homesick Swiss and the home-proud Laplander!

Is it his fellow-countrymen he loves? He never saw a thousandth part of the multitude. His regard for them can be only philanthropy. Is it family and friends to whom his burning patriotism gathers its focal heat? No; for we call such love by other names—parental, fraternal, filial. The domestic love is the most powerful antagonist of the patriotic. The fatherless, brotherless, childless man should be the readiest patriot. Is patriotism, then, sheer vanity, a thirsting for applause—mean selfishness hitherto mistaken for a virtue? Not so. Vanity is self-seeking—patriotism self-sacrificing. Vanity is defrauded by death. Patriotism is never gratified to the full till it can shed its blood. Vanity triumphs only in victory. Patriotism is most glorious in defeat.

The object of patriotism! Find it in the spiritual impersonation of the State; the ideal embodiment

of authority standing forth as a Divine mother receiving the tender and ennobling homage of her children. The patriot's love to her is filial; he triumphs in her glory; he weeps for her misfortunes; he burns at her disgrace; he defends her with his life, and when he dies he lays himself at her feet, looks up into her countenance, and smiling, with his last gasp, says, "It is for thee," "Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori." There is a place in every man's heart for this love, and to every man this love has a spiritual object, lifting him out of himself and filling him with an enthusiasm so pure that it is only the first grade this side of godliness.

And now having discussed the bearing of this theory of government upon the citizen, let us in a few closing words consider its relation to the magistrate. "Ordained of God." "He beareth not the sword in vain." August and impressive words they are. The chief magistrate, as the conservator of the nation's integrity and weal, has no personal option of duty; can have no personal fears, or favors, or interests. All must be merged and lost in the one engrossing sense of duty to the divinity which he represents. It is his indispensable function to defend the nation against aggression with stanch resistance, and to decapitate treason with the sword that has been "bathed in Heaven." If he

refuses, it is at his soul's peril. Again; if the magistrate be so near to heaven, how pure should his motives be, how aloof from the tricks and corruptions of politics! Sublimely high above all partisan influences, he should be emulous not of the reward and praise of men, but only of His, the Lord of lords, whose minister he is.

As we have thus traced the line of antecedence and consequence by which our nation was led to adopt its peculiar form and theory of government, has it not appeared to you as furnishing an explanation, in part at least, of our present difficulties?

If, as the strict social theory maintains, the real authority of all government rests only on convention, then it instantly lapses by secession. If government be the mere creature of human wills, is it not of necessity inferior to its creators, and may not any number of wills withdraw their share of the creative force, and stand aloof and repudiate the government?

Such we know to be the sentiments and practice of men and of communities among us; and it is the chaos which they threaten that we are met before God, to deplore and deprecate.

But this is only the natural cause of our troubles. May there not be moral causes more potential still? If civil government be a special institute of

God, may not the nation have provoked him by denying it? If the authority of the State be a Divine endowment, then to ignore its divinity must be a sin. I speak not now of those moral delinquencies which have been familiarly charged upon the practice and management of the government, corruptions, briberies, frauds, favoritisms, and other malversations of office.

But is it not conceivable that the blank in our Constitution, where God's name should be, is the fearful sin, which he has not forgotten? When the nation proclaiming its most deliberate decree, and declaring its most reflective convictions, set forth the Constitution as its elected theory and platform of government, and that theory Godless, was the nation's God well pleased? He has been patient because he is Almighty.

It may be that the red right arm has been restrained by his church's prayers; that he has spared the irreligious government for the sake of the religious people.

And this may be our hope and confidence even now, while the nation is trembling for her consistency and life.

Pray then that the threatening mischief may be averted, and its sad cause so compensated, that having escaped the present peril, the nation shall

learn to mingle piety with its politics—our land shall become Emmanuel's land, a mountain of holiness, and the habitation of righteousness—and then our Republic being even as the kingdom of God on earth, we may not fear to look up and pray, "Let it be perpetual."



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